



FORCED CHILD LABOUR IN UZBEKISTAN: SOME CHANGES – BUT NOT FOR THE BETTER

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Foreword

The use of forced labour in Uzbekistan's cotton sector is by far the worst human rights violation committed in this country. It affects about two million schoolchildren and students, hundreds of thousands of public servants and tens of thousands of farmers who are forced by the government to grow cotton.

Uzbekistan is unique in that it is the only country in which the government deliberately maintains a system of forced labour that includes children. It does so because their work is vital to the success of the cotton harvest.

When I worked at a human rights organisation in Uzbekistan, I heard hundreds of stories from people suffering as a result of the general environment of anarchy and corruption, without any recourse to justice. They turned to us activists, even though we ourselves, like them, were vulnerable in the face of the repressive apparatus of the state.

In 2007 I was arrested and sentenced to seven years in prison for the distribution of documents supposedly constituting a threat to national security. As a result of pressure of European diplomats, I was freed after four months incarceration, but for me continuing to work on human rights issues had become too dangerous and I therefore decided to leave my country.

From inside my country I thought that the enormous human rights violations taking place were known throughout the world. It was only when I went to live in Germany three years ago that I realised that this is not the case. The use of forced child labour in the cotton fields already existed during the Soviet era, but has only become a widely known fact recently.

Today, the regime does all it can to hide this fact. The police, the State Prosecutor, and the security services of the country all consider that it is their duty to prevent information on the use of forced child labour from getting out beyond the boundaries of the cotton fields.

No cotton picking season takes place without the use of child labour, and yet Uzbekistan's state institutions still present the phenomenon as one of children volunteering in order to help out their families. The Uzbek government denies all involvement in the organisation of forced labour. The regime instead points the finger at the farmers, whom they claim are guilty of using child labour entirely at their own initiative.

This claim contradicts documents, press releases and interviews that show that children are coerced into this work. A document we received in 2008 provides ample proof: it is an official letter from a school headmaster, addressed to a hokim (regional governor) and State Prosecutor, requesting that they prosecute students refusing to pick cotton.

It is our role, as Uzbek human rights activists, to lobby the international community and use outside pressure to bring about change. In authoritarian Uzbekistan, it is extremely difficult to resist from within the country, especially as there are no mechanisms that can be used by citizens to defend themselves from the arbitrary decisions of the state. External pressure seems to be the only way to compel the authorities to give up this practice of forced labour.

In order to put an end to the practice of forced labour in Uzbekistan, we need to find supporters in business, politics and civil society in Western countries.

We hope that this report will get widespread attention, alerting the broader public to the gross human rights violations that occur in Uzbekistan's cotton sector. We want as many people as possible in Europe to realise that the clothes that they wear may be made from cotton picked by the hands of Uzbekistan's children.

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Forced child labor in the cotton sector in Uzbekistan:

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All photos have been taken during the cotton harvest seasons 2010-2011 in Uzbekistan and are courtesy of the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights.

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Executive Summary

1 Uzbek children are made to work in the cotton fields through the systematic use of forced labour by the government of Uzbekistan. This phenomenon is different from the legacy of family farms, as practiced in Western Europe only a few decades ago. Uzbekistan has a high level of literacy and schooling; the agricultural sector was collectivised during the Soviet era, and then privatised after independence in 1991, though these hollow reforms did not diminish state control over this sector. It is upon the orders of the state, through the intermediary of local government and governors (*hokims*), that the transportation of schoolchildren to the cotton fields and their supervision and quotas are organised. Moreover, after 20 years of independence, Uzbekistan's economy has passed the subsistence stage and although we can observe a deep economic crisis, it does not justify the use of forced labour.

The interviews carried out during the 2010 harvest show that the use of forced child labour in the Uzbek cotton sector is being maintained unchanged: over two million children work in the fields. The majority of them are between the ages of 10 and 16 years old, but there are also some as young as 7. Cotton picking generally begins between the 5th and 15th of September and can last until November. The daily work of cotton picking begins between 7 and 8 in the morning and continues until 6 or 7 in the evening, with only one break for lunch. Working conditions remain difficult: food is not sufficient; there is no clean drinking water; and the accommodations provided are Spartan.

In 2010, we conducted research in the regions where the World Bank was operating its "Rural Enterprise Support Project." One of the research objectives was to test the hypothesis that the project contributes to the maintenance of the current system of injustice.

Uzbekistan's cotton sector is barely mechanised and in 2011, nearly all Uzbek cotton was harvested manually. However, we believe that mechanisation alone does not appear to offer a way out of the use of forced labour; in the current system, farmers have few resources to invest in their farms and mechanisation would likely be yet another way for government to pressure farmers.

2 The use of child labour is driven by the pursuit of maximum profit by those who financially benefit from the cotton sector -- all of whom are closely linked to those in power. At every stage of production, processing and sale of cotton, work is either performed by a state company which holds a monopoly (of ownership of the land; resources for the sector; purchase of cotton and therefore fixing prices; and ginning) or by actors, such as the export companies, which at first glance appear independent of the government but upon closer examination turn out to be a part of it.

Furthermore, the methods used to run this system of state control over the cotton sector are coercive, even violently so. Farmers

are forced to plant cotton rather than other crops that would be more profitable (wheat, fruits and vegetables); and are compelled to sell it to the Uzbek state, and to no other individual or entity. There have been instances of resistance from farmers, which are immediately and violently squelched through public humiliation and reprisals (water cuts; confiscation of land), and there have been beatings of intransigent farmers or uncooperative teaching staff.

The revenue from the cotton sector is not reinvested in the development of the country, but is monopolised by the authoritarian government, which depends upon cotton revenues to stay in power. The practice established in the cotton industry also fuels the government's client-patron network, with commissions taken by governors. As the cotton crop is spread throughout the country, this patron-client network reaches all regions of the country. It is employed as a tool to enforce the state's authority: by virtue of its demand for numerous workers, a large part of the population is brought under the control of the state.

3 This situation, which is now well documented by civil society organisations and recognised by some international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and UNICEF, has not yet been adequately acknowledged by international financial institutions and the European Commission. They maintain standard economic and commercial relations with Uzbekistan despite that Uzbekistan's conditions for cotton production are in gross violation of international conventions and trade agreements. Though civil society actors seek to put pressure on the Uzbek government to end the practice of forced child labour, there is little demonstrable change on the ground. The practice continues, even compelling several categories of civil servants (administrators, hospital staff, the army) to labour in the cotton fields using the same levels of violence and disregarding the conditions of those brought to the fields (complaints from pregnant women were particularly high this year). Also of note is that the agricultural workforce (day labourers) only works at the beginning of the picking season, when it is more profitable. At the end of the season, when there is less cotton in the fields, and weather conditions worsen, willing labour becomes scarce and increased pressure is placed on forced child labour. In this way, not only does the Uzbek state continue to force schoolchildren and students into the cotton fields, but it does so under the worst conditions, at the time when the work is hardest.

4 Cotton revenue, which is maximized by exploiting cheap labour, is an important strategic resource for those in power. That is why the regime is addicted to this system and doesn't have will to change it as changing the system would fundamentally question and weaken the current regime of power. However, the regime's high level of dependence on forced labour weakens its international reputation and legitimacy prompting the international community to respond by increasing pressure upon Uzbekistan. A few examples of such pressure:

➤ An initiative of the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (Berlin) exploits OECD guidelines and complaints mechanism to increase pressure on those European merchants who buy Uzbek cotton. This pressure forces them either to take action or communicate their concerns directly with the Government of Uzbekistan, and address human rights issues in their dialogue.

➤ On 14 December 2011, on its plenary session, the European Parliament overwhelmingly rejected a Protocol to the EU-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to extend this agreement to trade in textiles. The Protocol was earlier endorsed by the European Council. The overwhelming majority of Members of Parliament, 603 against 8, voted against it due to concerns over the on-going use of forced child labour in the country's cotton industry.

➤ A number of international organizations, including the ILO, called upon Uzbekistan to allow an ILO mission into the country to monitor the situation with child labour during cotton harvest. However, Tashkent has refused to extend an invitation to ILO. Instead, it prefers to deal with UNICEF the relationships with which is less binding, as UNICEF doesn't have a sufficient mandate to validate the country's compliance with international core labour standards.



What is the real price of Uzbek cotton?

Each year, between two and three million children are forced out of the classroom to work in the cotton fields, in order to pick this “national wealth.”

This report describes the Uzbek cotton sector from the point of view of human rights violations, notably in regard to children and farmers, as these two categories prove to be the greatest victims of this system. Other parts of Uzbekistan’s population are also targeted by coercive state policies aimed at guaranteeing its cotton revenues. The report also aims to establish who is accountable for these human rights violations. Despite its declarations to the contrary, the central government is the sole architect of this system: it is the one which gives orders, sets quotas, imposes the cultivation of cotton on farmers, forces them to purchase supplies from state-owned companies and monopolist suppliers, and obliges the farmers to sell their cotton to designated cotton-gins at prices fixed from above. For this system to function, a mechanism for the transmission of orders is essential; this is done through local governors, farmers and school headmasters. Orders are carried out under duress, sometimes using the threat of force, and have repercussions on the weakest parts of the population: schoolchildren, students, teachers and certain categories of civil servant.

This paper will attempt to describe the realities of the cotton harvest for the cotton pickers, both children and adults, as well as the organisers of the cotton harvest campaigns. It will describe how the state manages the cotton sector; a demonstration of the government’s urgent need for cotton revenues in order to remain in power will create greater understanding as to why it puts so much effort into the sector, and takes many risks in doing so. An exploration of international actions taken to denounce the management of the sector, will attempt to identify the changes already made, and the possibilities for further transformation.

Methodology

This paper is based on field research carried out during, and at the end of, the 2010 cotton harvest (between September – December) in 8 of the 14 regions of Uzbekistan:

- ➔ Tashkent (districts of Buka and Akhangaran)
- ➔ Syrdarya (district of Bayavat)
- ➔ Jizzak (district of Zarbrod)
- ➔ Kashkadarya (districts of Mirishkor and Nishan)
- ➔ Khorezm (district of Shavat)
- ➔ Karakalpakstan (districts of Berunyi and Elikala)
- ➔ Ferghana (district of Yaziyavan)
- ➔ Andijan (districts of Jalaquduq and Marhamat)

Some of these regions (Jizzak and the Ferghana Valley) were the subject of a similar research project in 2009, the results of which were presented in two reports published by the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London.¹

In 2010, the regions selected for study included some of those districts where the World Bank deploys its “Rural Enterprise Support Project” (RESP). The inclusion of the latter districts was done to explore claims by some Uzbek civil society activists that the appraisal document validating the rationale of RESP has misrepresented the real situation with reforms and the use of child labour in the agro-sector of Uzbekistan and thereby legitimised the current system of injustice.

The field researchers on this study are Uzbek journalists and human rights activists who have been carrying out this research since 2009. They are organised into five teams of two to three people: one team per region. They have received training each year in research methods as well as on issues linked to the subject matter.

The research was carried out in two phases. In the first phase the researchers went to the fields during the picking season to observe current practices. When conditions allowed they took photos and videos. Unfortunately, the sensitivity of the subject means that doing this puts them at risk.

The second phase of the research took place in the two weeks following the end of the harvest. During this period, the researchers took interviews, with questionnaires that were prepared in advance, and were used as a guide for semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed so that a full and accurate record of the interviews would form the basis of the analysis.

The research carried out during the 2010 harvest included 118 people, which included schoolchildren, teachers, parents and farmers – in order to contrast differing viewpoints, and to better understand the role of each actor and the pressures that they come under or pass on to others. As a rule, parents and children interviewed had to come from different families. The research was carried out in Russian and Uzbek languages, depending on the language spoken in the region. The interviews were not translated, but were used in their original languages by the authors.

Oblast	Districts	Kids	Teachers	Parents	Farmers	Total
Tashkent	Buka	3	1	1	3	8
	Akhangaran	3	2	2	3	10
Syrdarya	Bayavut	3	3	3	3	12
Jizzak	Zarbrod	3	3	3	3	12
Kashkadarya	Mirishkor	3	2	4	3	12
	Nishan	4	3	3	4	14
Khoesm	Shavat	2	2	3	3	10
Karakalpakstan	Berunyi	3	1	3	3	101
	Elikala		1			1
Ferghana	Yazyavan	2		2	2	6
Andijan	Jalaquduq	3	3	3	3	11
	Marhamat	3	2	3	36	12
TOTAL						118

Maintaining objectivity was of primary importance to the authors of the study: it's based mostly upon the data collected during the fieldwork research in November-December 2010. Other sources that were used included press and NGO reports, purported US diplomatic cables published by Wikileaks, and reports published by international agencies. The available data describes a complex reality: such a system of injustice cannot be maintained unless a certain number of people profit from it or find some opportunities to satisfy some needs. For example, the cotton harvest is a time in which adolescent boys and girls can meet outside the control of their parents, as well as an opportunity for them to save a bit of money for their personal needs.

But beyond these ancillary effects, it is important to explain why the state forces children out of the classroom and into the fields

and how detrimental this practice is for their education and health. We believe that the motivation of the state can be explained not only by its hunger for extra profit, but some consideration of political character. The system of forced labour reinforces the state-society hierarchy where the population is treated not as citizens, but subjects. The political nature of forced labour is difficult to assess due to the fact that all authoritarian regimes, and particularly that of Uzbekistan, are built on complete opacity making research and collection of evidence extremely difficult. The researchers and authors of this report are familiar with the political context, however the analysis will not go beyond the limits of their own observations and the available sources, all of which are cited in the report.

1) School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), "Invisible to the World? The Dynamics of Forced Child Labor in the Cotton sector of Uzbekistan" (published in 2009) and "What has changed. Progress in eliminating the use of forced child labor in the cotton harvests of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan", (published in 2010)

Cotton harvest : working under constraint

Of the four countries of Central Asia that account for almost all the cotton production of the former-USSR, Uzbekistan is leads with two thirds of all production, followed by Turkmenistan (18%), Tajikistan (8%) and Kazakhstan (5%)². Uzbekistan has remained the main agricultural producer of the region, and the percentage of its population working in this sector has been estimated at 40%. As the sixth largest cotton producer in the world, Uzbekistan is also the world's third largest exporter of cotton³. An estimated one billion US dollars of revenue are gained from the annual export of 800,000 tonnes of cotton. In total, it is estimated that in 2010-2011 the national production of cotton was close to one million tonnes of cotton lint – down from 1.6 million tonnes in 1990-1991, and in 2009⁴. President Karimov congratulated cotton farmers and pickers for achieving a harvest of 3.4 million tonnes of seed cotton (seed cotton = about 30% of cotton lint). This revenue makes up 60% of the foreign revenue gained from exports⁵. Despite the slight downward trend in the production of cotton since independence, 2010 had a harvest 4% higher than the previous year⁶.

The profile of forced child labour

Even though a large part of the working population works in the cotton sector, labour is conscripted during the cotton harvest. This requisitioning of labour mostly (though not exclusively) affects children. Estimates give us the figure of between 2 and 2.8 million children mobilised for picking cotton⁷.

The age of working children

Interviews taken in 2010's indicated that most of the schoolchildren who picked cotton that year were between 10 and 15 years old. The younger ones, between 7 and 9 years old, would generally be sent to the fields only at the end of the school day or on the weekend. These younger kids would generally finish the working in cotton fields in early October, while the older children continued working until the end of November, depending on the regions.

The mobilization of schoolchildren for cotton picking was the responsibility of the teachers, who also supervised them in the fields. Picking started daily at from 7 to 8 in the morning and continued until 6 or 7 in the evening; with just a one hour break for

lunch. The research into this past year's harvest again showed that the workdays were long, sometimes over 10 hours. Children ages 10 to 15 are given quotas to pick as much as 50-60 kg daily, while the younger children do not have a quota.

Children are not always given breaks during these long work days. Some teachers organise one day off a week, but this is done on a case by case basis. Some teachers are very hard on the children, while others can be a little more sympathetic.

Absences are closely monitored: should a child be absent several days, the teacher will personally pick him or her from home. If parents refuse to allow their children to pick cotton, the teacher, as representative of the state, will remind them of the obligatory nature of this work as well as of the consequences of refusal. The parents who protest the most are usually parents of the younger children. The chain of command around the provision of labour for cotton picking goes up from the schoolteacher to the headmaster and then to the *hokim* (governor) of the province.

2) According to the UNCTAD, <http://www.unctad.org/infocomm/francais/coton/filiere.htm>

3) Cotton Fact Sheet : Uzbekistan, http://www.icac.org/econ_stats/country_fact_sheets/fact_sheet_uzbekistan_2011.pdf

4) According to the Press Service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan: http://www.press-service.uz/en/news/show/pozdravleniya/3.4_million_tons_of_cotton_harvested_in_/

5) "White Gold: The True Cost of Cotton", Environmental Justice Foundation, 2005

6) Information Portal 12.uz, 16 October 2010: <http://www.12.uz/ru/news/show/official/5078/>

7) "White Gold: Uzbekistan, a slave nation for our cotton" EJF Foundation in partnership with Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, 2010; Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights, "Cotton is politics, Do Not Joke with it", Chronicle of Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan: Cotton Harvest 2010



Cotton harvest : working under constraint

Logistical issues: drinking water, nutrition, lodging and transport

During the cotton picking season, access to drinking water is not always provided. This means that children working in the fields must bring a bottle of water or cold tea. In theory, farmers are supposed to provide drinkable water, tea, or hot water in samovars (large hot water flasks) along the edge of the fields for the pickers. However, the children interviewed said that in their experiences working in the field they had been compelled to drink the water from the irrigation channels in the fields, which is not fit for consumption as it contains fertilizers and pesticides used in cotton cultivation.

During the day, children were provided with meagre food: usually some macaroni in a light broth. Again, children compensate for the lack of provisions by buying their own food: often they must spend their entire salary on food or bring their own meals. Children reported that farmers and teachers would receive better food, and often with alcohol.

In several regions, children went home at the end of the day, though this is not the case everywhere. For example, in Karakalpakstan, children stayed out in the fields for the whole harvest period, either sleeping in schools or in abandoned buildings. The children complained that they suffered from the cold at night, and that the lodging was in poor condition, as they were not designed for living accommodations, and therefore were uncomfortable and lacking amenities. Each child had to bring their own *kurpacha* (cotton mattress) and there were neither toilet facilities nor running water. Access to drinking water was also a problem in these circumstances, especially in the steppe, where due to the desiccation of the Aral Sea, the only available water is high in salts, and has adverse health consequences for those who drink it. Being sent to the fields is a legacy of the Soviet era when students went to live for one or two months in *baraks*. Today, this is rare, with children generally going to work in fields near their schools. Transportation to the fields, however, is still an issue.

When the fields are far from a school, farmers, at the orders of the local government, must provide transport to deliver cotton pickers to the fields. However they do not always do so and children are sometimes forced to walk. Some interviews have said that children have even had to walk as much as 8 kilometre distance to the fields. In other documented cases, the school pays for the transport from funds that teachers as well as students, pay. This makes a serious dent into the salaries they receive for cotton picking.

CABLES ON FORCED CHILD LABOUR

Human rights activists "reported that students in the eighth and ninth grades in their areas were bussed on September 23 to cotton fields 60 to 70 kilometres away. They worked from 7am to 6pm, with a one-hour break for lunch, and were given inadequate supplies of food and drinking water. They slept in barracks with bunk beds, without any division between girls and boys. The children were not paid, as the deductions taken for food and lodging exceeded any amount they might have earned. The children were returned to their homes on November 2, as the harvest in that part of the region was complete."

The alleged communication of the American Embassy in Tashkent, 2009 (excerpt)
<http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1579.html>



The use of chemicals and health problems

Cotton farmers claim that they no longer use the dangerous pesticides and defoliants of the Soviet period. They say they now use natural methods and mineral defoliants such as magnesium chloride. The latter is used to accelerate the ripening of the bolls and simplify the task of hand-picking cotton, increasing the quantity that can be picked in one day. It also protects the cotton from insects and parasites. This defoliant is used by several cotton producing countries. According to official Uzbek sources, its toxicity for cotton pickers is low so long as seven days elapse between its application and when the cotton gets picked. However, to date, no medical research has established the toxicity of defoliants; interviews with cotton pickers indicate that they may be the cause for skin cracks on the hands. This year, as in the previous year, researchers found that in the district of Bayavut, in the region of Syrdarya, defoliation was carried out between the 1st and 11th of September while the pickers were already in the fields. The fields are sprayed with pesticides and defoliants either from the air or by machines on the land.

The links between the use of these substances and certain health problems that are reported among the interviewed cotton pickers remains uncertain: in one interview, a doctor reported especially seeing cases of poisoning and allergies.

Overall, in the context of such working conditions, young cotton pickers quickly developed a range of health problems. Colds and upset stomachs, more frequent than in normal out-of-field conditions, are most commonly observed. However, these ailments are not sufficient for exemption from work in the fields: only an understanding teacher would let a child rest for a few days before returning to the fields. Skin problems on the hands, such as cracks and other wounds, are common and render the work of cotton picking much harder. Finally, several cases of tuberculosis and hepatitis have also been reported.

A teacher explains that illnesses and accidents during the harvest are not recorded in order to maintain the fiction that the children are at school during this period. Moreover, parents often also don't report these illnesses unless the need for medical intervention is critical. Finally, doctors are unable to write medical certificates (for exemption from work) during the cotton harvest. This is an order that they have been given orally, the origin of which has not been possible to discover. The only certificates that are accepted as an exemption from the harvest need to have been written before the start of the picking season.



Salaries

Usually, children get paid for their work in the cotton fields. Farmers give the salary of the class to the teacher every week or ten days. It is a cash payment that the farmer receives from the bank – *Agrobank* – based on how many schoolchildren and students he has employed. The teacher is in charge of the accounting and notes the amount of cotton each child picks each day. According to other sources, the salaries are only paid to the schoolchildren at the end of the harvest based on the number of children.

In 2010 the state set a price of 120 *Sum* (4 Euro cents) per kilo of cotton picked; but in practice, we see that farmers are more likely to pay 100 *Sum*, claiming the 20 *Sum* for themselves to cover costs associated with picking, such as the water that they provide for the pickers and the transportation costs to bring water to the fields, as well as to bring the children from the school to the fields. Another reason they give for retaining part of the salary is that cotton is damp and therefore heavier when it is picked, as opposed to when it is dry several days later, and then sold to the state.

At the end of the picking season the salaries tend to increase, reaching up to 120 to 150 *Sum* per kilo as there is less cotton in the fields. The increase is meant to motivate the workers, by now tired and encountering the hardest part of the harvest, to reach the quotas set by the state.



These salaries, though small, motivate a minority of the children who push themselves during the cotton harvest to save up some money. Over the entire season they can earn up to 60 or 70 thousand *Sum* (24-28 Euros), which is then spent either on a mobile phone or clothes. Many parents say that they would prefer that their children went to school rather than work in the fields. The money is not considered to be a significant contribution to the family income, even if the children sometimes give this money over to their parents.

“The salary earned in the fields is not worth the health of our children. Even at home we do not force our children to do hard work, especially not the girls. Why then should they be expected to do it elsewhere?”⁸

Some parents are not opposed to their children working in the fields if they are well supervised and if the conditions are not so terrible in their view. However, they do not want them in the field after 1st October: before this date there is enough cotton to pick in the fields, it is not too cold and the children are not too tired.

Conscription of adult population

Schoolchildren are not the only ones working in the cotton fields. During the past few years the tendency to conscript civil servants to pick cotton has increased. Interviews conducted during the 2010 harvest show that nurses, doctors, teachers and soldiers were also sent to the cotton fields.

Teachers from schools and colleges were the first to be sent to the fields, accompanying and supervising their students. Often they too participated in the harvest with their own quotas to fulfil.

As nurses and doctors are state employees, they could not disobey orders from their superiors within hospital administrations without the threat of dismissal. Before this could happen, they would find themselves under pressure through reprimands and administrative sanctions. Generally health workers do not put up much resistance against these orders, resigned to their inevitable participation in the cotton harvest.

“The cotton is like mobilisation during war time, there is no time for business. Each must go to the fields. We have a lot of cotton, but we do not have enough people to pick it. Because the wages for cotton picking are very low, there are not enough people who want to do it. This is why there is such strict control over the harvest, if not no one would do the picking” observed a farmer from Bukhara⁸.

Finally, soldiers are also mobilised to pick cotton. Interviews have shown that young soldiers work in the fields in the Zarbdor region, staying out in the fields day and night and sleeping in barns and even in tents, despite the cold nights.

Despite the mobilisation of civil servants for cotton picking, along with older schoolchildren in the first part of the harvest, the labour of young children (ages 7 to 11) continued to be used in the cotton fields for several weeks. According to observations made in previous few years, each year the harvest happens almost in the same way, with no significant changes. The mobilization for cotton picking can commence and end later or earlier, depending on weather conditions. During the 2010 and 2011 seasons, there have been attempts by the local governments to shift the burden of forced labour from younger to older kids, and from kids to college students and civil servants. But overall scale of forced labour remains the same.

CABLES ON FORCED CHILD LABOUR

Campaigns encouraging everyone to get out to the fields to do their part for the country are in full swing. A sign on the locked front gate to one of the markets in Jizzak cheered workers on. (Meanwhile, people streamed in the unlocked side entrance.) State employees are transferred to the fields (something undoubtedly not in their job descriptions), and private business owners are being asked to send some of their employees to the fields or to hire day labourers in their places. Threats, implied or explicit, often accompany these requests.

Alleged communication of the American Embassy in Tashkent, 2009 (excerpt)
<http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1579.html>

8) Interview, harvest 2010 (excerpt)

9) Interview, harvest 2010



The end of the harvest

Research conducted in 2010 shows very clearly that it is at the end of the harvest that pressure on children is the highest; at this point, meeting the state's quotas are dependent on them.

The cotton harvest does in effect have different phases in terms of weather conditions, the quality of cotton, payment rates and who is working in the fields. First is the beginning of the harvest, when there is an abundance of cotton which is easy to pick, and pickers can potentially earn more money. The second half of the picking season that may begin in October and last until the end of November is much harder as cotton is rarer: it is hard work with little returns, as pickers are paid by the kilo and not by the hour, and there is less of a chance to earn much money. The weather is also harsher, as the cold weather often arrives in the plains of Uzbekistan at this time. These factors mean that farmers are more likely to employ children at the end of the season, since adults refuse to work such hard days for only a few kilos of cotton.

The following excerpts of interviews with schoolchildren from the Beruniy and Bayavut regions demonstrate how late in the season they are sent to the fields, as well as the length of the season¹⁰:

"We pick cotton until the 18th of November. We went back to school on the 1st of November, but every day we only had one or two classes and after them we went back to picking cotton. Some days we had no classes and picked cotton all day."

"We nearly stopped picking cotton on the 20th of October, because there was nothing left in the fields. But despite this, we had to stay in the fields."

"When there is no more cotton, we are no longer motivated to go out picking. But every morning I am obliged to get up, I take two aprons, I take a meal in my bag and I go to school [from where the teachers accompany the children to the fields]. I do it automatically. And then we are allowed to return to school on the 5th of November."

"We thought that we would go back to school on the 20th of October because there was no cotton left in the fields. But we started classes again only on the 5th of November. They explained to us that the State needs our work, and that Uzbek cotton is precious on the international market, that contracts have been signed and that we have to pick the cotton down to the last flower in order to fulfil them."

The following interview with a farmer provides additional evidence:

"After the second and third phases of cotton harvest, it is impossible to keep the mardikors (day labourers) in the fields. When there is only a bit of cotton left in the fields, they do not want to pick it as the salary is too low. It is at this moment that the schoolchildren come to help us. The salary is not important as they are forced to come and pick the cotton."

The harvest of 2010 had its peculiarities, for instance, in the composition of the workforce mobilised to pick cotton. Both factory workers as well as residents of Tashkent, segments of the population who had not been mobilized in the previous ten years, were conscripted in 2010, and according to latest observations, in 2011 too. Some accounts have shown that even pregnant women were pressured at their places of work or study to go to work in the fields, finding themselves with no option but to take part. This was done probably to reduce the scale of mobilization of younger children. However, the practice of both forced adult and child labour remained systematic and on a mass scale.

Children continued to be forced to work in the fields, but our observations from 2010 showed that they were sent to cotton fields in a massive scale at the beginning of October when the payment for picking cotton was lower than at the beginning of harvest and the working conditions are harder. In the later period of the cotton harvest mardikors (day labourers) were less motivated to work in the fields and the local governments increasingly relied upon the compulsory mobilization of school kids, college students and civil servants.

In 2010, schoolchildren tended to be mobilised earlier in less populated regions (Khorezm and Karakalpakistan) than in those with higher density of population: in the Ferghana Valley, known for a huge labour surplus, they were sent out later in the season. Did the government really attempt to reduce the use of child labour, or just kept up appearances of progress in reducing the scale of child labour at the beginning of the harvest, the period that gains the most of international media attention? The latter is more plausible explanation.

10) Interviews, harvest 2010



CABLES ON FORCED CHILD LABOUR

"Activists reported that students from 9th grade (about 14 years old) forward were bussed or trucked out to the cotton fields in mid-September. Students brought their own food from home to supplement what is provided.

Drinking water is hard to come by in the fields, and activists stated that some children resort to drinking from irrigation hoses, which do not supply potable water. The children are paid 72 sum (less than five cents) per kilogram, as compared to 85 sum for adults (about six cents), and while the quantity a person picks in a day can vary dramatically depending on the land and conditions, 40-50 kilograms per day seems to be about average, resulting in a daily wage of between two and three U.S. dollars. While schools continued normal operations for kids in the first through eighth grades, attendance in those grade levels was considerably reduced, as many families send their younger kids to the fields voluntarily either because they need the help to reach the quota quickly or because they need the money."

Alleged communication of the American Embassy in Tashkent, 2009 (excerpt)
<http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1579.html>

Labour standards

Why do we consider the work of Uzbekistan's children during the cotton harvest to be forced labour?

According to article 2 of **Convention No.29 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)** on forced labour¹¹,

"the term *forced or compulsory labour* shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily".

Uzbekistan ratified this convention in 1997, but in practice it has never been enforced.

If the official definition of forced labour is based on the absence of choice and the use of threats, we can see that cotton picking in Uzbekistan must be considered as such. If there were choice involved, many would not participate. We will see in the following chapters what kind of pressure is exerted on individuals at every step of the cotton production process, and how it is organised.

The ban on forced child labour was codified in 1973 in **ILO Convention No. 138** "On Minimum Age for Admission to Employment." Uzbekistan ratified the convention in 2009. Article 10, paragraph 4¹² obliges its signatories to respect the following rules "when the obligations of this Convention are accepted":

(a) by a Member which is a party to the Minimum Age (Industry) Convention (Revised), 1937, and a minimum age of not less than 15 years is specified in pursuance of Article 2 of this Convention, this shall ipso jure involve the immediate denunciation of that Convention...

(c) in respect of non-industrial employment as defined in the Minimum Age (Non-Industrial Employment) Convention (Revised), 1937, by a Member which is a party to that Convention, and a minimum age of not less than 15 years is specified in pursuance of Article 2 of this Convention, this shall ipso jure involve the immediate denunciation of that Convention.

Article 32 of the **Convention of the Rights of the Child**¹³, also ratified by the Uzbek State affirms the "right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

Finally, the use of child labour during the cotton harvest contravenes the following conventions:

- ILO Convention No. 182¹⁴ in 1999 «On the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour»
- ILO Convention No. 105¹⁵ in 1957 "On the Abolition of Forced Labour".

In Uzbekistan's own Constitution's Article 37 prohibits all forms of forced labour. The Law on Youth Policy bans all involvement in work for schoolchildren and university students, unless their studies require it, is an apprenticeship, or is a form of collective or individual work on a voluntary basis. Law «On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child» adopted in 2007, asserts that anyone under the age of 18 is considered as a minor. Article 20 of this law modified in 2009 now allows children to work if the child is over age 15, the work does not interfere with studies, and is done with the consent of the parents¹⁶.

ILO Convention No.182 has been ratified by 169 countries, but despite this, the ILO estimates that since of 2000, nearly 1.8 million children worldwide are being used in the worst forms of forced labour (slavery, child trafficking, taking part in armed conflicts, prostitution, production and/or trafficking of drugs, and work that can affect the health and morals of children), and 170 million children participate in dangerous work.

11) <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/single.pl?query=011930029@ref&chspec=01>

12) <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/single.pl?query=011973138@ref&chspec=01>

13) <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

14) <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/single.pl?query=011957105@ref&chspec=01> ratified on the 24 June 2008

15) <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/single.pl?query=011957105@ref&chspec=01>

16) Changes in the law on the rights of the child, December 2009; <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/pdconv.pl?host=status01&textbase=iloeng&document=139&chapter=1&query=%23status%3D01&highlight=on&querytype=bool&context=0>

17) Interviews, harvest 2010

18) <http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1589.html>

The following excerpts from the collected interviews demonstrate the forced nature of picking cotton and highlight the complexity of the issue¹⁷:

“If we stay at home, the teacher comes and asks us to go and pick cotton with the others. If we do not want to go he threatens to give us bad grades or to expel us from school.”

“We sometimes prefer to work in the fields because all our friends are there and because we can earn some money.”

The interviews paint a portrait of a system in which everything is done to maintain an appearance of children attending school:

the teachers take daily attendance as if the schoolchildren were in the classroom, and not in the fields, maintaining an illusion that the schools are functioning. Additionally, doctors are not allowed to provide medical certificates (for exemptions from going to the fields) during the harvest so as not to generate any written documentation that may indicate that the children are actually out in the fields. In reality, reports indicate that schools are closed in most districts of the country¹⁸. Recent accounts include complaints from the parents of younger children who are not in the fields, but cannot go to school during the cotton picking season, since the schools are shut, with all teaching administrative staff in the field.



"If our children do not go to pick cotton, they [head teachers and teachers] lecture us on patriotism. They tell us that the times are hard: Kirgizstan and Tajikistan are in a permanent state of war. We must be grateful to President Karimov that we live in peace; this peace must be preserved and to do this we have to go and work in the fields to maintain peace in our lands"¹⁹.

The forced labour of Uzbek children in the cotton fields is not just a Soviet legacy but a deliberate policy carried out in spite of criticism and pressure from domestic civil society and from the international community. The Government of Uzbekistan takes the risk year after year of facing international criticism and being portrayed as a brutal regime depriving children of education for up to three months of the school year, and as a delinquent state, for infringing the international treaties and conventions that it has ratified. To understand why child labour is mobilised by force in Uzbekistan, one must understand that cotton is a strategic resource for those in power, and that they will use all means at their disposal to guarantee maximum return from the cotton export at a minimal price to be paid by the state. There it is not the case when children of farmers help their parents. This is a highly organized process that involves various state institutions and state controlled resources. The state acts here as the key actor and is itself controlled by small elite, who use state ownership of the lands and other leverage in its disposal to control the cotton sector and its revenues.

Maximization of profit?

Cheap labour

Resorting to a workforce made up of schoolchildren, students and teachers, and also of civil servants has a distinct economic advantage in terms of minimizing the cost of production. Compelled by the state to work, this workforce receives very low wages and accepts bad working conditions.

Though farmers explain that day labourers (*mardikor*) are more productive than the children, they prefer to work with schoolchildren as they are more docile and have fewer demands. One farmer confided that the *mardikor* demand a daily salary of between 18,000 to 20,000 *Sum*.

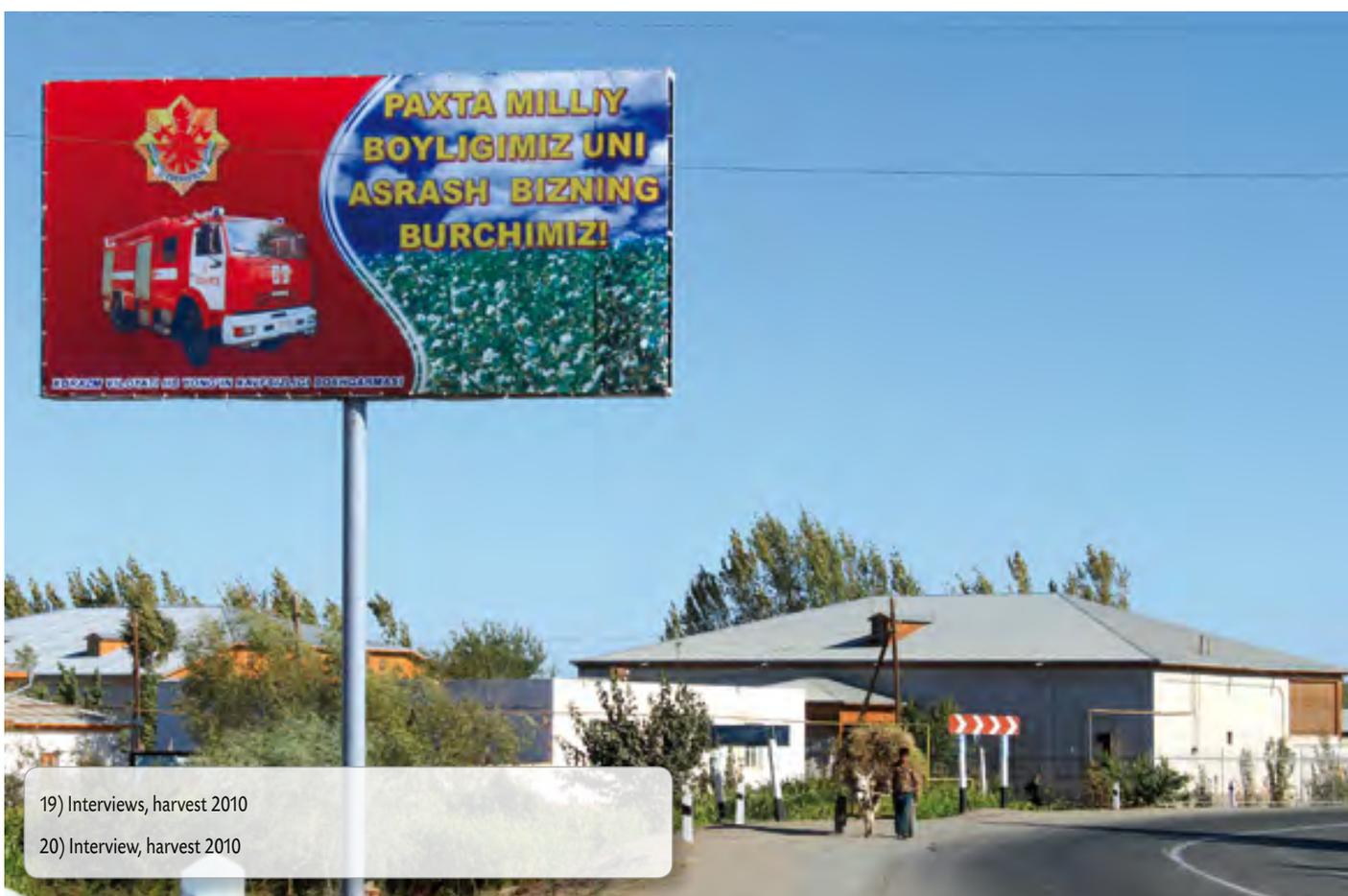
The constraint of reducing the cost of harvesting the cotton as much as possible must not be understood as solely an attempt by the farmers to increase their profit margins, but as a necessity by farmers who must cut labour costs in order to afford the rent for their land as well as earning some revenue. The state, in fixing low prices for the cotton, is the origin of these constraints. The state in this way has a large profit margin due to the price scissor. Below is the table demonstrating the rise of prices from the cotton picker to world markets. But even it doesn't show all loopholes that allow the state benefit more than farmers. First, the state receives at the end revenues in hard currency, while the farmers get their remuneration in local currency characterised with low purchasing power, due to galloping inflation. Secondly, although the margin between the world prices and the farmers output prices bound to be spent partly on ginning and infrastructure costs, anyway the state spends a little on infrastructure, the evidence of which is deteriorating irrigation, and especially drainage, system, the subject of a separate study.

The Uzbek agricultural sector is not entirely made up of poor farmers living in the precarious situation as described here. There are also those producers, close to those in power, who have negotiated the right to grow wheat – which is much more profitable, as opposed to those who have no means to resist and are forced to grow cotton.

Falsification of the quality of cotton

According to the accounts of farmers, the employees of the *khlopkopunkt*, the central administrative body for cotton in each district, systematically underestimate the quality of the cotton. This is another important means of leverage used by the State in order to increase its profit margins. The farmers have no choice but to give commissions to the *khlopkopunkt*, in order to secure their revenue, as shown by the following excerpt from the interviews²⁰:

*"If the laboratory puts my cotton in category 1/3 (very damp and dirty) instead of 1/2 I will sell at a much lower price. This is why from the beginning of the season I prefer to agree the category of the cotton by giving a bribe of 10-20 thousand *Sum*. It is nothing compared to the revenue I will get with the higher quality category."*



Cotton sector in the firm grip of the state



State ownership and state monopolies

In the end, the system of land ownership has changed little since the Soviet era: the state remains the proprietor of agricultural lands and manages the system of tenancy that gives farmers the use of the land for periods of 30 to 50 years. As the following testimony demonstrates, the State intervenes over and above the system of land ownership²¹:

"I do not have an opinion. The land belongs to the State. The authorities give us land and the order to provide a plentiful harvest of cereals and cotton. I am obeying an order. I have no other choice".

The farmers estimate that the following distribution of lands for various crops is imposed on them: 50% to 60% of land for cotton and 30% to 40% for wheat. This leaves little space for other food crops, such as fruits, forage and vegetables.²² While purportedly being the "wealth" of the country, cotton does not enrich the farmers; it does not even provide enough income to pay for inputs, taxes and various duties imposed by monopolist supplies and local administration. That is why they often try to grow food on a small plot of land – it is a lot more profitable than cotton – in the face of pressure to increase the area of their cotton crops. In not allowing farmers to choose their crops, the policy of imposed cotton production puts many families at risk. According to the accounts of

farmers, the government pays between 700 and 800 *Sum* per kilo of raw cotton, which is sold on the international market at between 7800 and 9500 *Sum*.²³ Those 700-800 *Sum* are going to be not enough to meet production costs.

Not only are all inputs (seeds, fuel, agro-chemicals and fertilisers, machinery) for cotton farming provided by the state controlled monopolists, they are actually imposed by the state: the farmers cannot choose their suppliers or seeds, fertilisers, equipment or fuel. This gives further opportunity to state representatives to exercise pressure and blackmail farmers.

List of state agricultural supply companies (not all of which are monopolies)

<i>Uzkhlopkoprom</i>	Ginning
<i>Uzkhimprom</i>	Fertilizers, Pesticides and Defoliant
<i>Uzbekenergo</i>	Fuel
<i>Uzneftprodukt</i>	Petrol, Gas
<i>Agrobank</i>	Credit/loans
<i>Uzagromashservis</i>	Mechanical Equipment (Tractors, machines etc.)

Mechanisation

The cultivation of cotton is an economic activity that employs significant manual labour, as there is little mechanisation in this sector, in particular for picking cotton. In all the Central Asian Republics post-Soviet agriculture is characterised by low levels of mechanisation. In 2009, only 2 to 3% of cotton picked by harvesters²⁴.

This low level of mechanisation is usually explained by the low level of fuel supplies in Uzbekistan. The non-availability of parts for mechanical equipment and of maintenance also creates a problem²⁵. Finally, mechanical picking is believed to produce lower quality cotton. Overall, the economic reality is that the context is not conducive to investment in machinery, and economically less appealing given the availability of cheap labour. But more importantly, the price set by the government at which they purchase the cotton, leaves little surplus income for farmers to invest in machinery. Due to farmers' low capital availability, external pressure by the Government of Uzbekistan encouraging mechanisation, and the requisite equipment purchases, would only put producers into debt.

21) Interview, harvest 2010

22) Interviews of Uzbek farmers, 2010

23) The comparison between these prices remains uncertain, as the price of purchase from farmers is for raw cotton (the form in which it is picked) whilst on the international market the State sells lint cotton (which has been ginned). The output of lint cotton is equivalent to 30-40% of seed cotton.

24) <http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1567.html>

25) UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade & Development), <http://www.unctad.org/infocomm/anglais/cotton/chain.htm>

State quotas

The interviews indicated that farmers receive quotas from the Ministry of Agriculture which means that the farmers must determine the amount of cotton each schoolchild must pick.

Interviews with the farmers indicated that it is nearly impossible to meet the quotas. The majority fulfil 70% to 80% of their quotas, but those who cannot, face the most serious problems.

Farmers are unable to meet the quotas for a variety of reasons: poor access to water (those with proximity to irrigation channels benefit the most); extortion by local administrations; drought (which was the case in 2011); soil depletion due to lack of crop rotation; unrealistic quotas, and bad agronomic management capacities. Those with close links to the local administration benefit from access to good land, water and lower quotas, while the main burden for fulfilling the regional quotas falls on the others. Quotas for schoolchildren vary on the basis of their age and how far into the picking season it is: those ages 14-16 have to pick between 40 to 60 kilos at the beginning of the season, and 15 to 20 kilos at the end. 12-13 year olds have a quota of 20 to 30 kilos at the start of the season.

At the end of the season there are effectively no quotas for pickers as there is so little cotton left in the fields. They have to pick as much as they can. On the other hand, the quota set for the *hokim* at the start of the season does not change: the plan must be fulfilled. At this point all sorts of negotiations are triggered. Parents of schoolchildren, students and civil servants pay the *mardikors* to pick cotton in their place, and pay them at market rates. Students and civil servants who do not participate in the cotton picking pay money to the administration, who in turn use the money to bribe their superiors, or pay *mardikors* in order to meet the quotas.

The following excerpt from an interview demonstrates the pressure put on the teachers and schoolchildren²⁶:

“The school re-opened today. The teachers told off the children who were wearing their new school uniforms when they should have been wearing their old clothes to go cotton picking in the fields. The teachers have to provide another 500kg of cotton, or pay 50,000 Sum. If not they will all lose their jobs.”

Seed Cotton Plant area and production

REGION	Area (Ha)	Target (MT)	Actual Production
Karakalpakstan	102,173	185,000	196,137
Andijan	113,156	310,000	310,021
Bukhara	127,948	360,000	385,486
Jizzak	106,750	234,000	250,408
Kaskadarya	181,000	426,000	450,924
Navoy	39,400	110,000	111,425
Namangan	103,104	261,000	261,026
Samarkand	103,400	248,000	263,850
Surkhandarya	123,000	345,000	345,347
Syrdaria	115,744	248,000	248,009
Tashken	108,000	275,000	275,028
Fergana	115,300	323,000	323,064
Ferghana	100,563	275,000	275,049
TOTAL	1,449,538	3,600,000	3,695,774

Source: GAIN Report, 2008

These numbers are the official government figures, so we know that they are overestimated in order to show that the economic plan has been fulfilled, as field interviews allow us to see that this does not correspond to reality.

26) Interview, harvest 2010

CABLES ON FORCED CHILD LABOUR

Early rains required farmers to replant the cotton fields last spring, and the cotton yields are expected to be less than normal as a result. Consequently, workers will have to get every last bit of cotton off the plants this year in order for each local subdivision to meet its quota under the State Plan. Local hokims and school administrators reportedly took bribes in the past from parents who did not want their children to participate in the harvest.

Jizzak activists stated that little of that is occurring this year in their district, as hokims are very concerned about meeting the quota, and as a result are focused on ensuring that every possible person is out in the fields.

Alleged report from the American Embassy in Tashkent, 2009 (excerpt)
<http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1579.html>



Links to power

This section will demonstrate that state apparatus is behind the coercive methods of labour mobilization.

Co-ordinating the school children labour

Beginning in July meetings in each region bring together the Prime Minister, the hokim, the farmers, school headmasters, State Prosecutors and police chiefs.²⁷ According to the accounts we collected, these meetings are held in the *hokimiyat*, which as the seat of state authority is well situated to exert pressure on all the subsequent links in the chain of command. The hokim, accompanied by other figures – State Prosecutor and police chief – notes the importance of this harvest for the country, and the penalties that exist in case of disobedience; everyone is reminded of their quotas. The school headmasters are reminded of the obligatory nature of the mobilisation of the children. All farmers are threatened with confiscation of their lands, and the school administration and teachers are threatened with losing their jobs if they do not carry out their part.²⁸ The threat of violence is not ruled out: one account reports that a *hokim* threatened to “rip the head off” those who did not fulfil the quotas set by the State.

The headmasters carry the responsibility for the recruitment of the schoolchildren, and therefore for their efficiency. The teachers are merely carrying out orders, in charge of the supervision of the children. An interview with one farmer shows that the pressure on the headmasters is very high:

“After the meeting at the hokimiyat, the headmaster of our school was very disturbed and angry. He seemed ready to kill us if we did not pick enough cotton. But this is understandable, as he could lose his job. To us, the farmers, they cannot do anything.” (Farmers can be evicted from their lands, but the reality is that the State needs them to work the land. As this is not a very attractive profession due to the low returns it brings, farmers are very rarely evicted).

Financing of cotton in the hands of the state: Agrobank

Agrobank, previously the *Paxtabank* (*paxta* means cotton in Uzbek), is the commercial bank for the agricultural sector. Interviews with farmers reveal the extent to which the financing of this sector is in the hands of this state financial institution.

The farmers take out loans every year in the spring, which must be paid back at the end of the harvest. It is not unusual for farmers, when there is a poor harvest, to be unable to pay their debts. The State Prosecutor uses the police to exert pressure on the indebted farmer, but these cases rarely go to court. The bank itself can

declare the farmer bankrupt and force them to file for bankruptcy, but our research in the field shows that this does not occur very frequently.

During the harvest, *Agrobank* pays an advance to the farmers for the salaries of the pickers. The farmers' accounts show that they draw up a list of workers, the majority of whom are children; make records of the quantity of the cotton being picked by each, and give all the information to *Agrobank*. In 2010 the bank paid 120 *Sum* per kilo of seed cotton; in the accounts of children and teachers we can see that in 2010 they were generally paid 100 *Sum* per kilo. The payment of these advances creates a deficit of cash in the whole country. This is why, during the cotton harvest, many employees in the public sector are not paid on time.

According to an interview with a farmer from Ahangaran (a region of Tashkent),

“Each autumn during the harvest season Agrobank gives the money to pay the cotton pickers in the cotton fields. All the state banks come together to help. They do this in order to guarantee that salaries are paid on time, because cotton is a priority for the state. This system creates a deficit which prevents the payment of salaries to other public institutions.”

Even if reform of the agricultural sector was designed to free the state from the financial management of the sector by entrusting its finances to private farms (*fermer*), the state has definitely not withdrawn from this economic activity. Its omnipresence is aimed at guaranteeing larger profit margins for itself. The very low level of autonomy granted to farmers in this economic sector demonstrates its strategic importance for the authorities. The economic planning and the state monopoly of resources and banking for agricultural production attest to the fact that the major economic actors in the cotton sector are not independent economic actors, and that there is no free enterprise in Uzbekistan, at least in the cotton industry. As private entities, the farmers are put in a situation making them totally dependent on and controlled by the state. Only those who are cronies and relatives of local administration can enjoy some benefits - receiving better lands, better access to water, more resources and lower production quotas. The three following monopolies guarantee hefty profits for the state at the expense of cotton producers: monopolist power to fix the procurement prices for cotton; monopolist control over the input prices; and the monopolist control over the cotton export. Besides, the government has never reported to the society how much it has gained from the export and how the cotton revenues have been used. The state budget itself has never been published and made available to the public.



27) Interviews, 2010

28) Ironically, in the following year, 2011, the threat of land confiscation ceased to make a desirable effect for the local administration. A new trend has emerged: the farmers have begun to give up the lands because the economic condition for the cotton farming becoming unbearable:
http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&sub=hot&cid=2&nid=18837

Cotton sector in the firm grip of the state

Top-down procurement prices

The fixing of artificially low prices for cotton is the key element that disadvantages the farmers, who are not free to organise their own production: neither can they sell their product to the highest bidder, nor can they choose to cultivate more profitable crops. They are trapped in an economy that ensures their own poverty, barely eking enough revenue to pay the rent on their land and pay back debts, both of which are for the benefit of the state.

CABLES ON FORCED CHILD LABOUR

In December of 2002, the GOU adopted a decree that allows farmers to sell up to 50% of their cotton output either domestically or abroad. This decree theoretically was supposed to bring the government's monopoly on the cotton market to an end and create production incentives. However, no concrete practical mechanisms have developed to allow this process to begin. Consequently, although officially the State order remains at 50% of the cotton produced, the State remains the only major player in cotton production and marketing.

Alleged report from the American Embassy in Tashkent, 2009 (excerpt)
<http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1567.html>

The production of cotton lint is controlled by *Uzkhlopkoprom - Uzpakhtasanoat in Uzbek* – which controls the ginning process

through small factories that are spread throughout the country. Uzkhlopkoprom is 51% owned by the state. The remaining 49% belongs to private shareholders unknown to the public.

CABLES ON FORCED CHILD LABOUR

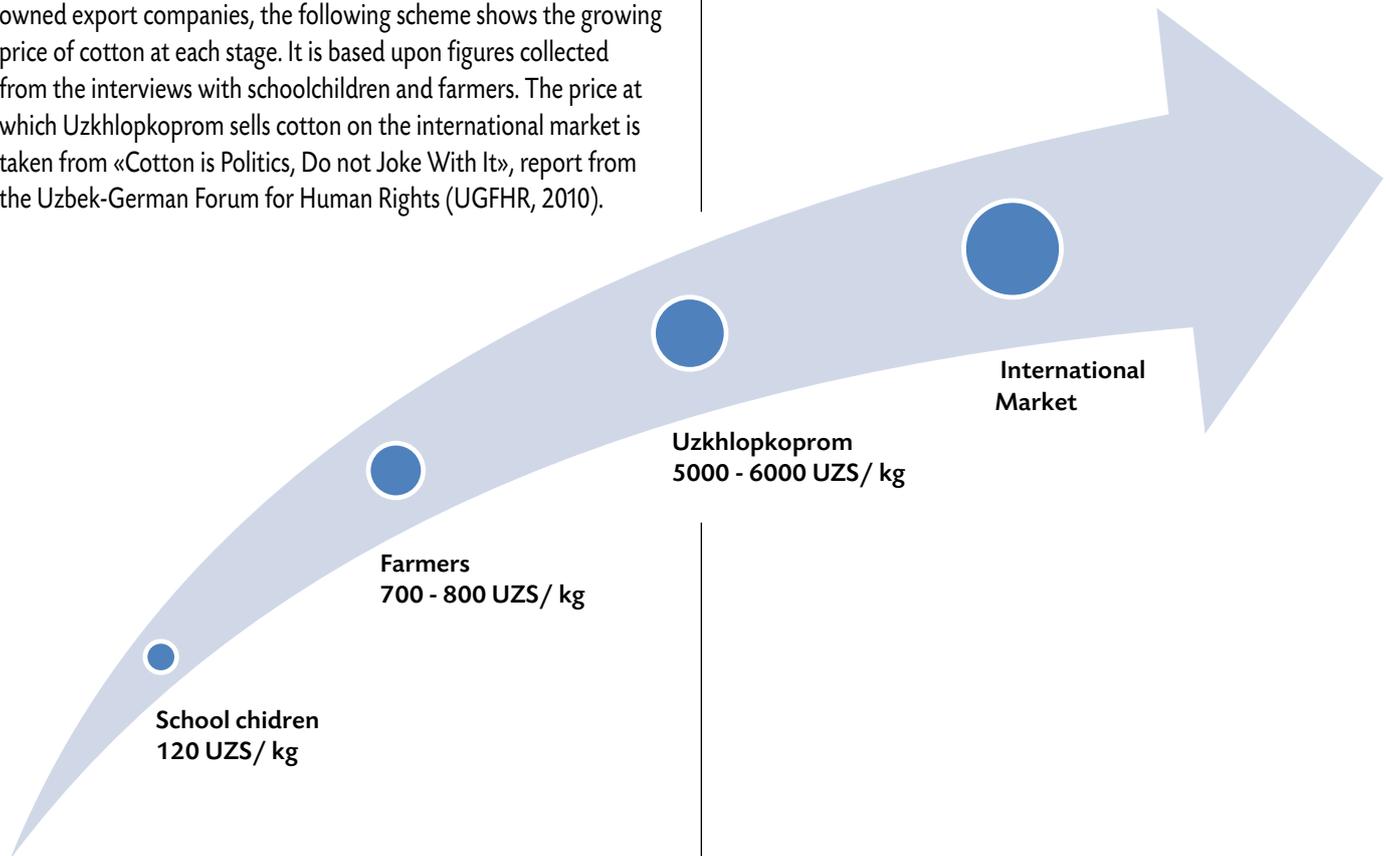
The Ministry of Finance has set the new average procurement price for seed cotton at Uzbek Sum 502,550 per ton (about USD 330), an increase of about 20% over last year's price, largely due to inflationary pressures. The GOU calculates its procurement price by subtracting official costs from export revenues. These costs include loans to farmers for inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, irrigation system maintenance (water is free for the agricultural sector), ginning and marketing costs, and financing of farmers' debt. In theory, this procurement price should be the full international price minus costs; however, the world price is calculated at an overvalued official exchange rate, and the charges for inputs, processing and marketing are typically understated. Thus, the price paid to farmers rarely results in profits, and every year Uzbek farmers cross the border to fetch higher returns in Kazakhstan.

Alleged report from the American Embassy in Tashkent, 2009 (excerpt)
<http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1567.html>



From cotton fields to international markets

In order to give an idea of the benefits collected by the state-owned export companies, the following scheme shows the growing price of cotton at each stage. It is based upon figures collected from the interviews with schoolchildren and farmers. The price at which Uzkhlopkoprom sells cotton on the international market is taken from «Cotton is Politics, Do not Joke With It», report from the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGFHR, 2010).



The state holds a monopoly on the sale of cotton to international markets. As one can see through the accounts collected, the cotton producers are not authorised to sell their produce at their own initiative. The major actors of cotton exportation are three commercial companies: *Uzprommashimpeks*, *Uzmarkazimpeks* and *Uzinterimpeks*, trading companies created at the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations. Initially integrated into the Ministry of External Economic Relations, they became “independent” in 2002. Not surprisingly, the State owns the majority of the shares of these companies. Nevertheless there is no communication on their activities, their performance, nor transparency concerning their revenues. These three companies together export 85% of Uzbek cotton; the remaining 15% is sold through the national commodity exchange, or directly to local buyers.²⁹ Although having an exclusive right to sell Uzbek cotton fibre, they have never been made accountable to the society.

This situation shows a collusion between the agents of the state and private actors in the economic domain. The Uzbek economy has not been liberalised, and the state maintains absolute control.

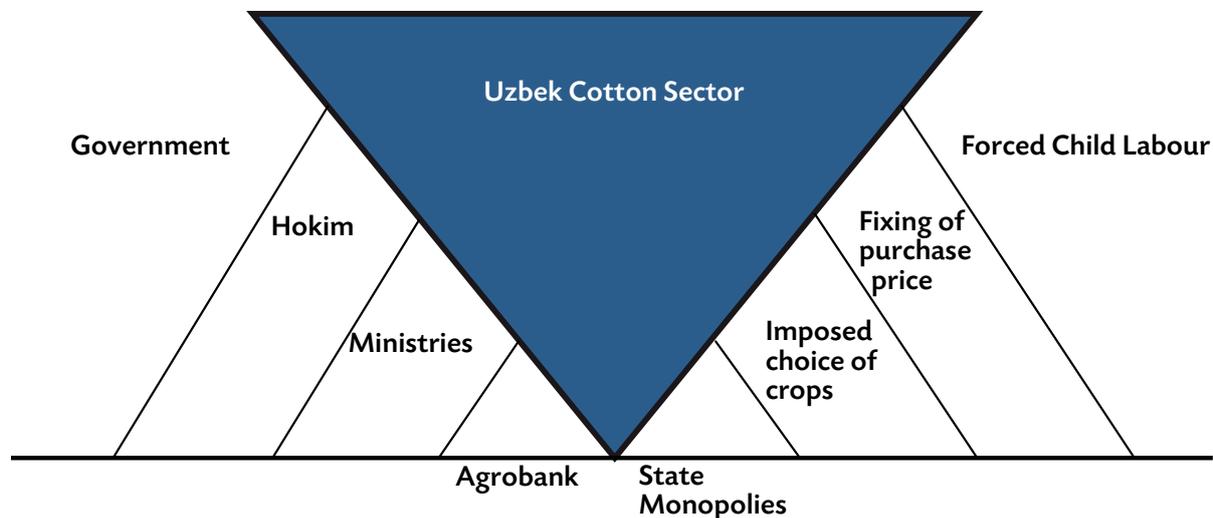


29) Uzbekistan's cotton sector still a bastion of the command, cable09TASHKENT1567, wikileaks, <http://www.wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09TASHKENT1567.html>

Cotton sector in the firm grip of the state

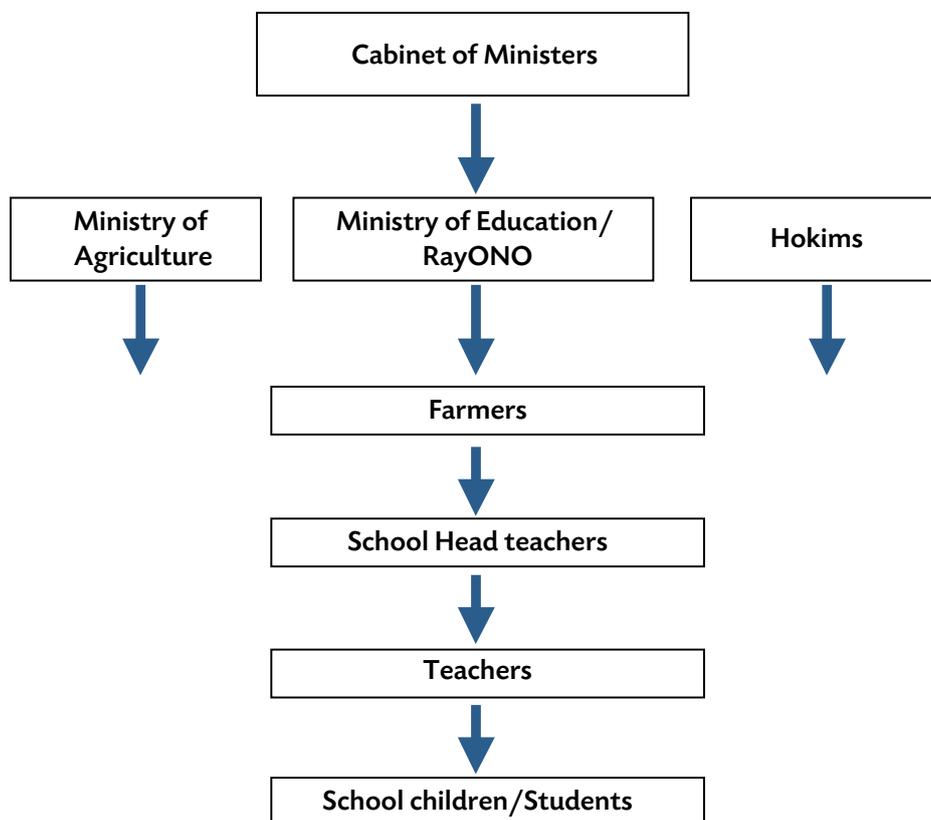
Chain of responsibility

On the basis of this analysis of the cotton sector, we can identify the actors (left) and the dynamics (right) upon which this unjust system rests.



This analysis also shows that these actors do not all have equal influence in this system: the farmers and school headmasters do not appear at all in the diagram as they are acting at the orders

of their superiors. The hierarchy of the system is strong, and we have seen that the pressure is passed down rung by rung from the government down to schoolchildren and other cotton pickers.



Cotton as a political resource

Beyond the economic dimension of cotton production, there is a political dimension: cotton is an important political resource, vital for the regime to maintain its power. The State has a number of means to ensure its omnipresence in cotton production.

In summary, the Uzbek cotton sector is in fact not independent from the State. Those who make decisions here are indistinguishable from the State or linked to the State. The methods used by the State (acting as a coherent system of cotton production) to avoid questioning of this means of production reveals how vital this activity is for the regime. It provides the revenue that keeps the regime in power, as well as enabling the personal enrichment of individual figures of the regime and continuing to exert constraint over the population. This strategically important economic production is also a political resource. The cotton sector represents here a clear illustration of State capture of the revenue from a national resource, for its sole benefit.

In order to function, this system needs resources. In the case of Uzbekistan, they are of a diverse nature and cotton is only one amongst a number: gas and minerals, and different forms of income. The revenues from cotton and this group of other resources each total about 1 billion US dollars. Commissions taken for services such as the transfer of goods constitute an additional source of rent in the system, benefiting local state actors. The system is not completely fixed, and it does respond to its environment. For example, reductions in land dedicated to cotton are observable in regions where gas is abundant (such as Khorezm).

We have mentioned the risks that the Government of Uzbekistan is ready to take in order to maintain this system cotton production. Recent trends suggest that cotton production is not only useful for providing financial resources to a costly political system (other rents also play that role) but it also offers two further advantages:

- ➔ As cotton requires numerous workers, it impacts a large part of the population and enables the state to exert the kind of control of the population upon which the regime is based as well as reinforcing the whole architecture of the power from the ministers down to the teachers. In this way it discourages any resistance.
- ➔ As cotton production is developed in all administrative regions of the country, it fuels the patron-client system upon which the regime is based - taking commissions at each step. The responsibility for the quotas of the cotton production is transmitted not only vertically but also horizontally between the farmers and teachers and school headmasters.

In this way cotton production fulfills various functions: generating revenues, implementing and demonstrating the state's control of the population, and ultimately ensuring the redistribution of resources that undergirds the patronage system.

Options for combating forced child labour

It has been shown that the revenue from this sector is not redistributed for the greater benefit of the Uzbekistan society at large, but monopolised by the authoritarian regime which depends upon it. As a result, any transformation of the sector implies a questioning of the nature of the authoritarian regime. This vital resource rests upon a set of interdependencies upon which action must be focused.

Four different types of action are examined here in order to consider what impact they might have:

- ➔ Critically scrutinizing the World Bank's "Rural Enterprise Support Project"
- ➔ Putting into place an "effective dialogue" with corporations mediating
- ➔ Adoption by the European Parliament of a political position
- ➔ Creating an independent mission of inquiry by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to recognise and validate the collection of information by civil society organisations.

Questioning the role of IFIs

The World Bank's Rural Enterprise Support Project started in Uzbekistan in 2001 and entered its second phase in 2009. The project's stated objectives are to increase the productivity and sustainability of Uzbek agriculture in the domains of finance, irrigation, training and project management. The allocated budget for the second phase is 67.8 million dollars and the implementing agency is the Uzbek Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources.

In spite of ambitious objectives such as to increase production by 15% and access to financial services by 40%, the farmers interviewed by our team showed almost no signs of awareness of the project. Most of them declared that they received no help from the World Bank and suspect that the loans were given to *Zeromax* – a well-known local company allegedly owned by one of the president's daughters – that had its own cotton farms and textile manufactures across the country.³⁰ In the Mirishkor region, farmers heard of the project at the hokimiyat but had no chance to participate in it. Interviews only reflect some project activity on rehabilitation of drainage systems but not dealing with the other three other of the project. The general impression is that the farmers are sceptical about international aid as long as it is channelled through the state authorities.

The Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan "Ezgulik" has written an open letter to the Vice-President of the Bank³¹ as well as released

an independent review of the World Bank's Rural Enterprise Support Project – Phase 2. "Ezgulik" alleges that the World Bank "has failed so far to provide an adequate assessment of the realities in the agro-sector of Uzbekistan." From that statement, the organization regrets that the Bank's support to projects has been unconditional and based on an incorrect impression of Uzbekistan's agricultural sector. Secondly, Ezgulik laments the project's failure to promote real reforms and encourage the government of Uzbekistan to end human and labour rights violations in the agricultural sector.

Ezgulik tried to pay attention to two following issues:

- The failure to promote genuine reforms in the agricultural sector that would undo the centralized management of the two major agricultural sectors (grain and cotton) in which the command economy still prevails; farmers still lack the freedom of enterprise;
- Casting a blind eye at the issue of forced child labour issue, considered as "not a big issue," which undermines the credibility of the World Bank.

Bringing cotton traders to account

This action is based on the principle that corporations trading in cotton of unknown origin would suffer reputational loss. This is effective under conditions of widespread media coverage and awareness on the part of consumers, who are already demanding higher ethical standards, proving that consumer choices are becoming progressively more socially and ethically driven.

The European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR, Berlin) has lodged a complaint about the breaking of guidelines set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) against seven enterprises, traders and retailers in four European countries (United Kingdom, France, Germany and Switzerland) who buy their cotton supplies from Uzbekistan. The companies include:

- Otto Stadtlander GmbH, Germany
- Ecom Agroindustrial Corp. Ltd, Switzerland
- Paul Reinhart AG, Switzerland
- Devcot S.A., France

- Cargill Cotton UK Ltd., United Kingdom
- Louis Dreyfus Commodities, Switzerland
- International Cotton and Textile Trading Co Ltd., United Kingdom

This complaint refers to two kinds of breaches of these guidelines:

- Not using their influence to persuade Uzbekistan's suppliers to respect human rights standards (part of the guidelines of the OECD);
- Rendering themselves complicit with the Government of Uzbekistan in its violations of human rights.

By submitting several complaints simultaneously, ECCHR aimed to demonstrate the scale of the problem. This is not a matter of individual companies but rather a European-wide problem: cotton traders across the continent are involved in cotton trade with Uzbekistan.

The OECD guidelines are international standards for the responsible behaviour of multinational enterprises that oblige them to respect and defend human, social and labour rights, as well as the protection of the environment. Signatory states have to put into place National Contact Points that promote these guidelines and deal with any possible violations.

According to these standards the use of forced child labour in Uzbekistan's cotton sector means that the country cannot be used as a supplier.

The complaints - submitted in collaboration with the Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGF), Sherpa (France) and the Swiss attorney Guido Ehrler - have been accepted for further consideration in spring 2011. Since summer of 2011, several companies have agreed to undertake concrete steps and the relevant National Contact Points opened mediation proceedings with the companies. Two agreements have been reached with British cotton traders Cargill Cotton UK and ICT Cotton UK on future corporate policy and have been publicized by the British National Contact Point³². Both companies have pledged to implement specific measures to positively influence the situation in Uzbekistan.

The ECCHR's objective to establish the dialogue between European cotton traders and civil society organizations aimed to create transparency and accountability where there was none: the traders, other than the retailers, are not in direct contact with consumers and thus less dependent on public opinion. The overall objective being to abolish forced child labour, the cotton merchants are expected to use their influence on the Uzbek authorities to achieve that result. ECCHR shows its determination to file further OECD complaints, this time demanding an end to trade relations with Uzbekistan.

The rationale behind this action is based on the privileged and strategic position of the cotton traders, who are in direct relationship with the Government of Uzbekistan and the incentives created for them to initiate an "effective dialogue" to convince the latter to abandon the use of forced child labour. Traders and retailers are not only important buyers (about 12% of Uzbek production³³ of Uzbek cotton, they are also the most reliable commercial partners of the Government of Uzbekistan (established in the area for decades, they have created branches in Tashkent and established good relations). The European market is the main outlet of Uzbekistan's cotton, both raw and processed. Contrary to current concerns that Uzbekistan would turn away from its European partners, towards its Russian and Chinese neighbours,³⁴ the country of white gold seems instead to be seeking to strengthen its partnerships with the West. This means of action is therefore an effective one: because Uzbekistan is afraid of losing them, European traders do in fact have the possibility to negotiate and affect the choices of the Government

of Uzbekistan. For them to do this, a strong political signal needs to be sent, without which there are no benefits for them in taking the initiative.³⁵ Extensive media coverage would encourage and allow it.

Under the current conditions a boycott of Uzbek cotton is difficult to put into place: it is predicated on the possibility of identifying the origin of cotton from the picking stage right up until the final stages of manufactory production and trade of final commodities, like cotton containing fabric or garments. The steps between the two are numerous, as are the stakeholders in this process, and as far as cotton travels extensively. The stage at which tracking cotton becomes difficult is the spinning stage, since it is not uncommon for cotton of different origins to be mixed. Certificates of origin – present at the sale of lint cotton – get lost at this stage. With regard to Uzbekistan's cotton, this stage happens mostly in China, Bangladesh and Vietnam. This is most likely not so much the result of negligence as of a desire to hide the origin of cotton from Uzbekistan, which due to the media coverage of forced child labour, has now become undesirable.

Several actors are currently involved in the creation and putting into place of mechanisms to trace the origin of cotton: *The Fair Labour Association*, *The Responsible Sourcing Network*, and *Historic Futures* are some of those engaged in the issues around Uzbek cotton. One of the results of these actions is that big companies and brands in the textile industry are advertising the fact that they do not use Uzbek cotton, such as Hennes & Mauritz, American Apparel, Liz Claiborne, Wal-Mart, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, Gap, Burberry, Adidas, Puma, Nike etc.

The boycott, while not yet a practical and tangible one, has value in shaping public opinion and securing media coverage on the issue of forced child labour.

30) In 2011, Zeromax went bankrupt.

31) Open letter to the Vice-President of the World Bank, December 2010 <http://en.hrsu.org/archives/882>

32) <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/business-sectors/low-carbon-business-opportunities/sustainabledevelopment/corporate-responsibility/uk-ncp-oecd-guidelines/cases/final-statements>

33) <http://unctad.org/infocomm/anglais/cotton/market.htm>

34) Radio Ozodlik, 22.09.2011, <http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24336692.html>

35) "Uzbeks Seek Closer UK Trade Ties", IWPR, 24.11. 2010, <http://iwpr.net/ru/node/49346>

The responsibility of the European Union

In 2005 Uzbekistan became a beneficiary of the European system of preferences "Generalised System of Preferences" (GSP).³⁶ The objective of this system is that developing countries get preferential trade status for certain goods through the reduction of import taxes, and without any reciprocal obligations.³⁷ In this way the export profits of the beneficiary country are increased with the goal of promoting industrialisation and accelerating economic development. The European Union in this manner favours the export of Uzbek cotton, produced by means of forced child labour and as a result contributes to guaranteeing the resources of the incumbent authoritarian government.

A consortium of the following organisations was mobilised in order to demand an investigation into this policy:

- ➔ Anti-Slavery International
- ➔ Business for Social Compliance Initiative
- ➔ Children Worldwide Fashion
- ➔ Ethical Trading Initiative
- ➔ Uzbek German Forum for Human Rights.

They acted in partnership with trade unions represented by the:

- ➔ International Trade Union Confederation (European)
- ➔ European Trade Union Confederation
- ➔ International Textile, Garment & Leather Workers Confederation (Brussels)
- ➔ European Trade Union Federation: textiles, clothing, leather

This system of preferences has been denounced by several members of the European Parliament, who wrote a report and have raised awareness of the issue. On 14 December 2011, on its plenary session, the European Parliament overwhelmingly rejected a proposal submitted by the European Council to endorse the Protocol to the EU-Uzbekistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to extend it to the trade in textiles. The decision of the MEPs were driven by concerns over the on-going use of forced child labour in the country's cotton industry. 603 MEPs voted to send back proposed legislation that could have resulted in the EU increasing its textile imports from Uzbekistan, including cotton harvested by children, until the issue of forced child labour has been addressed, and only 8 MEPs voted against. This decision is already creating pressure on the Government of Uzbekistan, for whom this agreement is no longer a given, and it also allows for awareness raising and media coverage of the issue of forced child labour, which is not to their advantage either.

As a minimum, this type of trade agreement should be scrutinized and incorporate guarantees in terms of the respect of human and labour rights.

36) Cotton Campaign, 2009

37) http://www.miti.gov.my/cms/content.jsp?id=com.tms.cms.section.Section_697f7757-c0a81573-66466646-1561dbc6

38) http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&cid=3&sub=&nid=17357



Inviting the ILO mission

Even though the forced labour of Uzbek children has been mentioned twice, in 2010 and 2011, by the ILO Committee for the Application of Standards, and also recognised by UNICEF, what is missing is the recognition of international financial institutions (the IMF and World Bank) as well as intergovernmental organisations, particularly the European Union as they are developing trade relations with Uzbekistan.

The ILO has for its part recognised the problem, and is considering taking up a position to condemn the practice. To this end the ILO

has made a request to the Government of Uzbekistan to allow it to carry out a mission of inquiry on the ground into the question of forced child labour. The Uzbek authorities have to date refused permission, declaring that they organise this themselves, and that it can be better carried out by representatives of trade unions controlled by the government. Even if this response is “ridiculous”³⁸ it confirms the observation that the Tashkent government is intensifying its position of denial.

Consolidating international pressure upon Uzbekistan

The reactions of the Government of Uzbekistan reveal its sensitivity to international campaigns denouncing the use of forced child labour, and that it will respond with some action, however small. The government was forced to open up communication with selected international institutions and consult the representatives of the ILO and UNICEF on the question of forced child labour, followed by the ratification of two ILO conventions on child labour. Uzbekistan’s attitude towards dialogue is disappointing: the government is communicating and thus showing that it does react to criticism, but has no intention of changing its policies and practices on the ground. The ratification of ILO core labour standards have not resulted in any policy changes so far. Only some laws banning child labour were adopted, however, without any efforts to enforce them in reality.

The government has not fundamentally changed the nature of its workforce which remain comprised of schoolchildren, students, civil servants or soldiers coerced to work in cotton fields. The methods of recruitment remain the same: the cotton pickers are drafted under pressure and through the use of different forms of blackmail and intimidation. In the context of Uzbekistan, positive incentives are being used in a limited extent: the labour is being remunerated but at very low rates.

The response of the Government of Uzbekistan has resulted in solutions that are as bad as the practices being criticized. The government has come up with what can be called ‘avoidance strategies’ that have harmful consequences on the population, as the government is not willing to retreat from the command economy and its authoritarian position. Dialogue remains limited as the willingness to share the profits from cotton with the farmers is still weak. Oppressive methods persist.

Actors in the system of injustice described here are driven by economic factors and consolidation of power. The current environment does not provide them with any incentive to change. For cotton revenue to be better distributed throughout Uzbek society, there must be a different context - one in which the actors of the system will have something to gain from this change.

European merchants have an interest in demanding that the Government of Uzbekistan sell cotton produced in conditions that respect international standards, without fear of damaging their position, if:

- The social and political dimensions of the problem are systematically included into trade relations, as the search for maximum profit is harmful to certain individuals and groups of individuals;
- Consumers are fully informed about the conditions of production of their purchases, and are therefore able to choose ethical and equitable products;
- If national, international and intergovernmental political actors are to abandon political alliances with those that openly flout human rights.

Such changes in the context depend on two forms of action:

- Major political actors adopting positions in favour of stopping preferential trade partnerships that do not respect international conventions and standards of human rights and working conditions
- Media coverage of forced labour in the Uzbek cotton sector with the aim of politicising consumption and marginalising Uzbekistan’s cotton until the conditions of production change.

Options for combating forced child labour

The first of these seems out of the question, as the current geopolitical context is placing new constraints in terms of security: with a view on the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan, Western states need a new ally in the region in which to base their forces, which makes Uzbekistan a favoured candidate despite the nature of its government. We are therefore not at a point at which we can expect a political marginalisation of this country, or expect pressures to be exerted upon it.

The second form of action, on the other hand, has possibilities: our analysis lies at the level of structural change. The actors that would

benefit from these changes are either too few or too weak, without the means to act on the *structure*. This analysis must therefore raise the issue of equipping those actors that do have an interest in change and in a shift in the power balance: how to return to these actors the means to weigh more heavily in the current balance of power? Civic action is a possible means of initiating the desired structural changes. And civic action depends on exposure in the media, and shaping the choices of decision makers. From a pragmatic point of view, the possibility that the current regime will see its resources diminish is the only thing that will exert influence.

The 2011 harvest

The reports already received from the current cotton harvest in Uzbekistan state that:

One week after the return to school, colleges and universities had already announced the departure of their students for the cotton fields. At the professional college in Bukhara, specialising in textiles, the students were sent to the fields on the 7th of September at 9 in the morning. The students of Karshi State University left on the 8th of September. The Rector's office confirmed this information, adding that the students are picking cotton in the district of *Nishon*.

Already the students are searching for ways of escaping this obligation:

Muzaffar, a student from the Karshi Polytechnic University (Kashkadarya region) explained that they tried to obtain medical certificates stating their inability to carry out physical labour. In 2010 these cost 100,000 *sums* (about 30€)³⁹. "Obtaining a medical certificate is only a temporary solution: after two or three days the teacher will come to my home to fetch my child" declares a mother.

The students of the Department of Paediatrics of the Andijan Institute of Medicine (Ferghana Valley) called to Radio Liberty in order to describe the abysmal conditions in which they are forced to work. They also condemn the tyranny of their teacher who beats them if they do not pick their daily quota of 100kg⁴⁰.

In the Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Khorezm and Samarkand regions, the students of business schools and academies were sent into the fields on the 6th September. They are between 14 and 16 years old.

A human rights activist has been able to establish that in school No. 56 of Nurobod (Ferghana Valley) only children between 7 to 12 years old are still at school, the older students having been sent into the cotton fields⁴¹.

In the Jizzak region, even pregnant students from the Institute of Pedagogy have been forced to go and pick cotton, under the threat of expulsion. The husband of one of them informed Radio Liberty of what was happening, with the latter receiving more and more similar accounts:

"My wife is six months pregnant; of course she cannot work in the fields. They are threatening to expel her from the Institute, or she has to pay \$200. I am a teacher; my salary is 200,000 *sums* [about 60€], not \$200. If my wife is expelled now, she will not be able to return to the Institute. I do not know what to do."

These individual cases testify to the continued obligatory nature of participation in cotton picking, and to the fact that the victims of its violence are becoming greater in number. Accounts from the harvest that is now underway echo this and document many instances of maltreatment⁴².

It is the hokimiyat of each province which organises the mobilisation of the students to the cotton farms: the doors of the colleges were shut, buses were lined up to load in the students and their belongings – in this way they can be separated from their families for up to two months, and the police escorted them on the road.

39) Radio Ozodlik, 06.09.2011,
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24319711.html>

40) RadionOzodlik, 12.09.2011
<http://www.ozodlik.org/content/article/24326204.htm>

41) 19-09-2011,
<http://www.ferghananews.com/news.php?id=17311&mode=snews>

42) Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights,
www.uzbekgermanforum.org

Glossary

Barrack: Rough shelter built on farms to accommodate seasonal labourers.

Hokim: Representative of the State at the level of the region, district and town; governor.

Hokimiyat: Local office of the state at the level of the region, district and town.

Khlopkopunkt: State administrative body in each district that assigns quality categories to the cotton. They have laboratories (*pervaya baza*).

Kurpacha: Thin cotton mattress. It is used for sleeping, either as a mattress or blanket, and for seating to receive guests for a meal.

Mahalla: Town district, neighbourhood.

Mardikor: Day labourer.

Paxta: Cotton.

Shirkat: Agricultural cooperatives.

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The Grenoble Ecole de Management created the Centre d'Etudes en Géopolitique et Gouvernance (Centre for Geopolitical and Governance Studies) in 2010, in order to coordinate the development of its work on how the activities of the school and the career paths of its students fit within the current context of complex globalisation. The purpose of the centre is to carry out educational programmes, conferences such as the "Festival of Geopolitical and Geoeconomics"; and editorial and research activities. Its scope of study includes the aspect of management, risk assessments, and security in economic intelligence. The approach of the centre also takes into account issues of Corporate Social Responsibility, as Grenoble Ecole de Management is a signatory of the Global Compact and the UN Academic Impact Initiative.

The conditions under which the production of Uzbek cotton is carried out were integrated as a case study into a course on corporate responsibility ("Corporate Social Responsibility in a Global Economy") given to the third year students in 2009. It appeared to us essential in the education of future business executives that they understand the issues surrounding different forms of production. The Uzbek cotton sector raises many such issues: judicial, political, public health, educational and finally wider social issues. This case study allowed future decision makers to become aware that objectives of management cannot be disconnected from their political and social environments.

Over and above this, it is for us as Europeans, in the name of the values that underpin the European construction to be vigilant and exemplary so that these values are not pushed aside in the name of economic interest. Finally, by our actions we should support the Uzbek people, who in the arenas still open to them within an authoritarian system, continue to denounce these brutal practices.

Jean-Marc Huissoud, Director and the team of the Centre d'Etudes en Géopolitique et Gouvernance (Center for Governance and Geopolitical Studies CEGG)



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